

Former trustee is making prom dreams come true



Taffeta Time

Robin Hadfield shows off some of the dresses she has collected so far for Ballroom Blitz, a program that matches new or gently used formal gowns with girls who otherwise wouldn't be able to afford a dress for prom.

- Tracy Dermott photo

By Tracy Dermott

Do you remember your high school prom: going shopping for the dress, the shoes and getting your hair done? Robin Hadfield does, and she wants to make sure all girls graduating from high

school have the same chance to enjoy their big night.

The Utopia woman has started Ballroom Blitz, a charity that collects new and gently used evening and ball gowns for girls who might not have the means to buy their

own gowns.

"(Prom) tickets alone are \$80," she said. "Proms now average about \$350 per girl. That's not including going to the hairdresser - that's another \$80. And if they get a limo, it's \$50 per person for three couples to split it."

Hadfield said she heard about a similar program last spring. She started researching it but put the project on the back burner for the summer.

"I heard about it and thought 'that's a great idea, how come no one is doing it here?'"

Hadfield, a former school board trustee, knew where to turn first. She contacted the principal at Bear Creek Secondary School, Randy Bauer.

"He said there are three to five girls every year who don't go to the prom because they can't afford it," she said. "There are 16 high schools in Simcoe County. That means there are 50 to 100 girls who graduate and don't go."

That was all it took to get Hadfield moving. She contacted the Bridal Wreath, a wedding store in Barrie, to see if they'd hang up flyers for customers to see. They ended up giving her a few dresses that were lying around.

Her next call was to the Simcoe County District School Board.

"It wasn't to get permission," she said, "but because they are one

of the largest employers in the county and over half are women."

Hadfield thought it was the perfect spot to start looking for donations.

As with most good ideas, things quickly snowballed. Wanda Fluney, a hair and makeup expert has offered her services. Teachers throughout the board have also heard what Hadfield is doing and want to help.

Her biggest surprise came when she took the idea to school councils.

"I'd never seen anything like it," she said. "There was 100 per cent participation. I've never seen every parent say 'I'll help.' People have been so incredibly supportive."

So far, she's managed to collect 35 dresses. She's hoping for more, and she's hoping to have enough dresses for girls who need them by April.

"Most of the proms are at the end of May or beginning of June," she said. "In April we'll have a boutique day. Girls will have to bring proof they're graduating. It'll be on a first-come, first-serve basis. The girls will be assigned a personal shopper and will be taken around to choose a dress, shoes and a purse."

In addition, Hadfield is hoping to get enough Simcoe County businesses involved that she'll be able to hold raffles for other services

important to making prom night the best experience it can be. She hopes to get certificates from hairdressers and limo companies to give away.

"It'd be nice if we could make it a memorable experience for them (students)," she said. "It's not just about the dress. It boosts self-esteem for girls who've never had anything. It's giving them encouragement that they can do something — that there's a future for them."

Hadfield said the program won't be asking for proof of financial need. She just hopes those who need the program will take advantage of it, and those who don't, won't.

"We're just saying, if you want a dress, we're here to help," she said.

Hadfield is accepting volunteers, donations, and businesses that want to act as drop-off centres. So far dresses can be dropped off at Cotty's Cleaners, Wright's Cleaners, the administration office at the Kozlov Centre in Barrie, the Bridal Wreath in Barrie and the Pizza Hut at CFB Borden.

"I will come and pick the dresses up," Hadfield said of the drop-off centres.

Anyone interested in donating or getting involved can call Hadfield at 705-424-6788 or e-mail ditodisc@gmail.com.